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141609Z Feb 06

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001095

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/P, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA
USAID/ANE/MEA
LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION ON HAMAS OUTREACH TO
JORDAN AND RUSSIA

1. Summary. Lead stories in all papers over the past fortnight, February 2-14, focus on Hamas' efforts to reach out to Jordan and other nations such as Russia. Media coverage has consisted of meticulous reports of Hamas' statements as they evolved. Editorials and commentary have discussed Jordan's potential vulnerability to an Israeli-Hamas standoff, the perceived need for Jordan to establish a dialogue with Hamas and assist the Palestinian people without compromising Jordan's position, and Russia's invitation to Hamas as "a brave step" even if it leads nowhere. End summary.

Media coverage

2. Jordanian print and electronic media have given saturation coverage of Hamas' victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections and its public statements in the days following. All dailies reported on February 2 the visit by a delegation of the Jordanian Islamic Action Front, headed by Shura Council President Abdul Latif Arabiyat, to Damascus, where it congratulated Hamas leaders on their movement's electoral victory. The IAF delegation reportedly returned with the message that Hamas is ready to bury the past in its dealings with Jordan. Separate reports quoted GOJ Official Spokesperson Nasser Joudeh as saying that political and legal problems remain regarding the status of the Hamas leaders who were expelled from Jordan, even though they bear Jordanian nationality.

3. On February 7, all dailies reported the statement by Joudeh that Jordan has not received any official request from Hamas to visit Jordan. He also stated that Jordan has not received requests for asylum from any Palestinian personalities.

4. On February 12, all dailies carried front-page reports regarding Hamas' outreach to Jordan and to Russia, including the U.S. reaction. Headlines read "Hamas affirms that it has received an official invitation to visit Amman" - Independent, centrist, widely circulated Arabic daily Al-Ghad. "America receives Russian assurances that it would push Hamas towards a peaceful solution" - Leading, semi-official Arabic daily Al-Rai. "Moscow will invite the Movement to recognize Israel; Hamas: The cabinet is ready and we wait for the participation of the factions" - Center-left, influential, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Ad-Dustour. An inside page report on February 12 in Ad-Dustour quoted the statement of Osama Hamdan that Hamas would be willing to turn a new page with Jordan, and to develop the relationship into a partnership. The independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm quoted the same day unidentified GOJ sources as saying that Jordan does not expect a visit by Hamas leaders before resolving their nationality issue.

Editorial commentaries on Hamas and Jordan

-- "Hamas and Jordan"

Chief Editor Ayman Al-Safadi of the independent, centrist, widely circulated Arabic daily Al-Ghad wrote (2/13): "There are many indications that the dialogue proceeds positively, which is reflected in the statements of Hamas leaders, who are aware of the support that Jordan can give them on the international arena. Hamas needs this support to succeed in its new role, as a government that runs the affairs of the Palestinian people, and that negotiates on behalf of that people. Factors that unite Jordan and Hamas are greater than those which separate them. The establishment of a Palestinian state is a Jordanian interest, as it is a Palestinian right and ambition. The need to coordinate efforts to achieve this common

goal will push both sides to reach a practical formula that addresses political imperatives as well as legal questions."

-- "Let Us Think Together of New Horizons"

Columnist Nahed Hattar wrote in the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (2/13): "The government of Jordan now has no choice but to receive the leaders of Hamas immediately, without preconditions, and to reach a formula for cooperation with them outside American and Israeli pressure. Hamas leaders today insist on keeping their Jordanian nationality, which is clearly part of a political position. Is it a message that they do not recognize the disengagement of the two banks? Are they thinking of returning to the bosom of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and restoring Jordanian-Palestinian unity, which was broken by Fatah? Let the options stay open. Let us withdraw our recognition of Israel in order to overcome the Wadi Araba and Oslo at the same time, and let us in doing so bury the Jordanian Palestinian split. Let us think in terms of new horizons for the solution based on international legitimacy, which consists of a total and unconditional withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and creating a united kingdom embracing the two people, which would be Arab and democratic, and with a radio station that speaks from Amman and Jerusalem."

-- "On Jordan and Hamas"

In a clear reference to the op-ed piece written by Nahed Hattar recommending that Jordan should rescind the Wadi Araba treaty in order to turn a new page with Hamas, columnist Oraib Rantawi wrote in the center-left, influential, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Ad-Dustour (2/14): "It is true that Jordan is not required to spearhead the countries that pressure Hamas to accept in advance the three conditions stipulated by Washington. but it would be politically absurd to ask Jordan to adopt the program of Hamas, withdraw its recognition of Israel, and rescind the peace treaty. That advice would be fit for a 'martyrdom cell' not for a state in the situation that Jordan is in. Most probably, Hamas leaders, at the peak of their euphoria, did not imagine making such demands of Jordan, but it seems that some people among us want us to be more pro-Hamas than Hamas."

Editorial commentaries on Hamas and Russia

-- "The Road to Moscow is like that to Washington"

Veteran columnist Tariq Masarwah wrote in the leading, semi-official Arabic daily Al-Rai (2/14): "Hamas' first experience in Moscow will not result in a breakthrough in the wall of enmity to Palestinians, because the Russian Federation is not the Soviet Union, and Putin will say very little that is different from what his representative said to the Quartet. Reaching Moscow will not change much. Fatah managed to reach Washington DC before this, and the gates of the White House were opened to it, but the 'light at the end of the tunnel,' as the whiz kids of settlements like to say, did not manifest itself."

-- "A Brave Russian Step"

Atef Al-Jolani, chief editor of Islamist Arabic weekly Assabeel wrote (2/14): "The Russian move does not lose any of its importance because of the statements by Kremlin officials that they will ask Hamas to recognize Israel and give up resistance. Those who understand politics realize that the Russians are striking a balance by sending comforting messages to assuage the angry reactions, of those who are angry and afraid. Hamas realizes the reasons behind Russia's comforting messages to Washington and Tel Aviv, and Moscow is aware of the clear positions of Hamas that refuse to recognize Israel or to renounce resistance, but this has not affected the desire of either party to meet the other. Those who wagered that Hamas would fail after it is politically isolated and financially besieged, are reviewing their calculations and reducing their expectations."

-- "Hamas: A New Strategic Vision"

Columnist Nahed Hattar in the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (2/12) assesses Russia's initiative towards Hamas and wonders about Hamas' "lukewarm" reception. He concludes: "Hamas is now facing a strategic choice and it will not be able to maneuver or stall for long. It either repeats Fatah's experience and follows the Americans and their Arab

allies or it succeeds in finding for itself a new position in the context of the Russian-Iranian-Syrian alliance and its Lebanese and Iraqi extensions. Hamas can present a new framework for the settlement with Israel without giving concessions on basic Palestinian rights and without slipping into a situation of partial negotiations and security solutions and getting blackmailed by Israeli threats of boycott. But this new framework requires a new strategic visions."

-- "The Israeli Stand on Hamas"

Center-left, influential, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Al-Dustour's editorial (2/12) says: "One must stop and consider the Israeli angry reaction to the Russian President's invitation to Hamas to hold talks in Moscow about the future of the Palestinian Israeli peace process.. Without any respect for a country of Russia's size and as far away from diplomatic courtesy, the Russian President was warned that he would be taken off any contribution to the Middle East peace process should he indeed go ahead and make that invitation formally to Hamas.. In principle, Russia has the right to make its contribution towards supporting the peace process any way it sees fit. After all, it is a member of the quartet committee that originally formed the roadmap. In terms of logic, there must be someone on that committee who is able to talk with Hamas, the movement that is going to form the new Palestinian government and the one that holds parliamentary majority via free elections. The United States and the European Union are not going to take that step and the United Nations has nothing to offer in this regard. The Russian initiative may not have been done without consultations with the US administration and other international leaderships, but Russia does not need Israel's permission to hold contacts with Hamas.. There is a difference between objecting to Hamas' position on the conflict with Israel and objecting to the will of the Palestinian people and the presence of this movement on the political map. When this objection comes from the same party that refuses to grant the Palestinian people the minimum level of their rights, then Israel's stand in this case goes beyond being a formality objection to becoming a complete and final objection to the Palestinian existence on the Palestinian land."

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